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## Relational Self-Construal Moderates Relationship between Relational Success and Self-Esteem

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Relational Self-Construal Moderates Relationship between  
Relational Success and Self-Esteem

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PROJECT TITLE: Honors Thesis: Relational Self-Construal Moderates Relationship between Relational Success and Self-Esteem

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### Abstract

This study examined the role of the relational self-construal, the degree to which people incorporate close relationships into their self-concept, in the Sociometer Theory, which claims that self-esteem is the output from relational acceptance or rejection. I hypothesized that (a) the relational self-construal will moderate the relationship between loneliness and self-esteem, and (b) the relational self-construal will moderate the relationship between the quality of relationships and self-esteem. A total of 183 undergraduates completed a series of online questionnaires. I found a significant negative correlation between loneliness and self-esteem. I also found that for women, but not men, the relational self-construal moderates the relationship between the quality of relationships and self-esteem. So, for high relational women, the quality of relationships is positively related to self-esteem, whereas for low relational women, there is no relationship between the quality of relationships and self-esteem. This study demonstrated the importance of the relational self-construal for relational theories such as the Sociometer theory. This study also suggested that gender differences play a role in the relationship between the quality of relationships, relational self-construal, and self-esteem.

## Relational Self-Construal Moderates Relationship between Relational Success and Self-Esteem

The need to belong is a central human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). People have a profound drive to form intimate interpersonal relationships, and positive outcomes result when people develop these relationships. Social relationships have also been consistently linked with health benefits (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). Past research on the need to belong shows how fundamental and powerful relationships can be; however, the self-concept has a role in relationships, too. The current research examines the benefits of relationships in general, and particular focus is given to specific, close relationships. The purpose of this study is to explore the importance of the self-concept for relational success and self-worth. This analysis incorporates individual differences, which provides depth and variety to the relational literature.

### **Self-Construal**

Self-construal is how individuals define and understand the self. Self-construal differences appear between men and women. There is substantial evidence that women are more likely than men to describe themselves in terms of relatedness to others, whereas men are more likely than women to describe themselves in terms of independence from others (Cross & Madson, 1997). Women tend to take the perspective of the other and pay attention to partners than men. Women are also more inclined to remember relational events (e.g., a first date) than men (Cross & Madson, 1997).

There are also self-construal differences between cultures. Markus and Kitayama (1991) identified two main self-construals, independent and interdependent. Individuals with an independent self-construal strive for separateness and autonomy. They define themselves based on unique qualities which differentiate themselves from others (e.g., I'm organized, determined,

and brave). They strive to demonstrate their specialness and uniqueness. Individuals with an interdependent self-construal define themselves based on group membership, with the goal of connectedness and interdependence. Markus and Kitayama (1991) found cultural differences in these self-construals: Western cultures were more likely to foster an independent self-construal, while East-Asian cultures were more likely to foster an interdependent self-construal. Research on these group differences in self-construal—among genders and cultures—laid the foundation for the relational self construal, an individual difference in self-construal. Individuals may differ markedly in the degree to which others are incorporated into their self-construal.

### **The Relational Self-Construal**

The relational self-construal is the extent to which individuals define and understand themselves in terms of their relationships with close others (Cross & Morris, 2003). Defining oneself in terms of relationships with close others has profound influences on behavior and social interaction. The relational interdependent self-construal (RISC) measures the degree to which people conceptualize themselves as defined by their close relationships (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000). The two ends of this continuum are the “high-relational” and the “low-relational.”

High relationals are quite attentive to close relationships; they focus on their connections to others, concerning themselves with others’ needs and wishes. Their representations of significant others and relationships share the self-space with other attributes, such as abilities, traits, and goals (Cross, Morris, & Gore, 2002). Their aims and goals are cooperative, so close relationships do not conflict or impose on them (Cross & Gore, 2004). In fact, relationships are the priority, so often the relationship itself is the goal. Because their identities are based on relationships, high relationals put energy into maintaining and supporting relationships. They come to feel relatively good or bad about the self as a function of how they feel about the

significant other (Andersen, 2002). They want to nurture this essential part of who they are. For the high relational, this comprehensive self-definition will influence cognitive, emotional, and motivational processes that are not necessarily linked to a specific close relationship (Cross et al., 2002). Low relationals do not find relationships self-defining. They are less likely to make decisions based on the needs of close others, and relationships do not influence their cognition or motivational processes to the same degree. High and low relationals define and understand themselves differently, and these variations are apparent in the interpersonal relationships of high and low relationals.

### **The Relational Self-Construal and Interpersonal Relationships**

Maintaining close relationships is central to preserving a stable sense of self for high relationals, so these individuals strive to develop skills and abilities that foster close relationships (Cross & Morris, 2003). For high relationals, relationships are not just about the other; they involve the self as well. Interpersonal relationships are an investment, and the return is twofold: for the self and the other. High relationals' motivation for close relationships has implications for their behavior within interpersonal contexts. They behave in a manner that establishes closeness in a relationship and motivates the partner to also develop and maintain that relationship. There are distinctive qualities that high relationals bring to relationships. Morry and Kito (2009) found that high relationals were considered better friends than low relationals. Higher RISC scores are related to higher levels of disclosure/openness, trust, friendship, satisfaction, liking and loving, and friendship affect. Individuals who define themselves in terms of relationships with close others behave and think in ways that maintain or increase the quality of their relationships (Morry & Kito, 2009). This is not to say that low relationals may never be considered good friends by others; rather, on average, high relationals embody more friendly

qualities. This research suggests that perceptions of others may be influenced by the relational self-construal.

High relationals exert care and effort to ensure an enduring close relationship. Almost everyone attends to disclosures of values and beliefs in close relationships, but not as much in distant relationships. Several studies (Cross & Morris, 2003; Gore, Cross, & Morris, 2006) researched the development of relationships within new, unacquainted roommates, which epitomizes a distant relationship that still has meaning. Gore et al. (2006) found that those who defined themselves primarily by their close relationships (high relationals) took the opportunity to form a meaningful relationship with their roommates. They perceived their roommates as potential friends and constructed a social atmosphere with the roommate that fostered a close relationship. Low relationals did not take the opportunity to develop a relationship with their roommate.

Cross and Morris (2003) found that high relationals were more likely than low relationals to accurately predict their roommates' self-reported values and beliefs. This provides evidence of the intimacy that high relationals nurture, even in distant relationships. It also shows that high relationals pay close attention to their roommates. Cross and Morris (2003) also found that high relationals were more optimistic than low relationals about becoming close to others in distant relationships. Perhaps high relationals are more likely to see the potential in a relationship and work hard to make friends, expanding their self-definition.

Cross et al. (2000) paired random strangers together and allowed these individuals to get to know each other. The experiment was meant to simulate the process in which two acquaintances might begin to form a friendship. The individuals rated each other on openness and responsiveness. High relationals were rated as more self-disclosing, and the relationship with



their partner was rated more positively overall. These studies provide evidence that defining the self in terms of close relationships has an important influence on individuals' motivation to cultivate close relationships, resulting in the use of tactics which connect distant individuals.

High relationals form a strong connection within close relationships. A fascinating study by Gore and Cross (2011) illustrates this concept perfectly by focusing on conflicts of interest within a close relationship. High relationals tend to integrate differing interests within a relationship. Rather than perceiving these interests as oppositional, high relationals are inclined to view a potential win-win outcome. When others are considered part of the self, the considerations of costs and benefits involved in making decisions may change; choices that benefit the other may also be viewed as benefiting the self. Gore and Cross (2011) found that high relationals were more likely to perceive a personal loss when they chose a solution in favor of themselves, whereas low relationals perceived a personal loss when they chose in favor of their friends and family. Another way of looking at these results is that high relationals are more willing to compromise. A related study by Cross et al. (2000) researched the differences in decision making processes between high and low RISC individuals. These researchers found that high relationals were more likely to consider the consequences of their decisions for other people, take into account close others' opinions, and freely generate relationship-orientated factors in their decision. This evidence shows that high relationals have different cognitive processes than low relationals. High relationals are able to unify and connect people, a quality which builds close relationships.

### **Sociometer Theory**

Sociometer theory, like the relational self-construal, emphasizes the importance of relationships in peoples' lives. Sociometer theory states that humans developed a system that

monitors and responds to cues that indicate the possibility of social exclusion (Leary, 2005). This system is called self-esteem, and it is the output from social interactions, specifically interpersonal acceptance and rejection. People with high self-esteem feel that they were, are, and will be valued by others. On the other hand, those with low self-esteem doubt their value in relationships and remain doubtful about their future relationships (Anthony, Wood, & Holmes, 2007). Thus, when an individual feels rejected by others, it results in low self-esteem. On the other hand, when an individual feels accepted by others, it results in high self-esteem.

Sociometer theory asserts that self-esteem is not an end in and of itself. Self-esteem has no inherent value. Self-esteem is akin to a fuel gauge (Leary, 2005). The fuel gauge alerts the driver when the fuel supply for the vehicle is low or high. The gauge itself does not get “fueled” when the driver gets gas. It is merely a symbol providing output based on the fullness of the gas tank. Similarly, self-esteem cannot be “refueled” directly. As fulfilling relationships are formed, the gas pumps in, and the fuel gauge of self-esteem rises accordingly. Therefore, the fuel is from the relational acceptance.

The analogy of self-esteem as a gauge implies that the sociometer should be sensitive to and accurately reflect current environmental conditions. Weisbuch, Sinclair, Skorinko, and Eccleston (2009) found that fluctuations in self-esteem can result from subtle and overt social cues, are limited to a specific relational context, and can extend beyond the moment in which the cue is initially encountered. This supports the analogy of the fuel gauge because self-esteem fluctuates with environmental conditions, yet effects may also linger on longer than expected. Self-esteem levels have implications for decision-making behavior. A study by Anthony et al. (2007) compares those with high and low self-esteem regarding their willingness to join a group. The participants make this decision based on feedback they receive about how the group

perceived them. The researchers manipulated the type of feedback from the group to either portray obvious or ambiguous acceptance. The results suggested that those with low self esteem were less likely to join the group when acceptance was ambiguous, but that those with high self esteem would join the group regardless if the feedback was ambiguous or obvious. The ambiguous acceptance theoretically allowed for an opportunity for the participant to estimate their own assumption of what the group might end up thinking of them. So, the researchers surmised that those with low self-esteem projected their doubts, whereas those with high self-esteem projected their confidence. Overall, the self-esteem level of the participant was related to their decision of whether or not they joined the group. The decision participants made with ambiguous feedback reflects and perpetuates their perceptions of themselves. Such results clearly demonstrate the link between self-construal and self-esteem.

### **Self-Esteem and Interpersonal Relationships**

Sociometer theory asserts that self-esteem is an outcome resulting from positive social interactions and maintaining close relationships. Many relationship variables have been correlated with self-esteem, lending support to the Sociometer theory. On one end of the spectrum, self-esteem is positively correlated with the quality of relationships (Gabriel, Renaud, & Tippin, 2007). On the other end of the spectrum, self-esteem is negatively correlated with loneliness (Olmstead, Guy, O'Malley, & Bentler, 1991; Yilmaz, Hamarta, Arslan, & Deniz, 2013).

Yilmaz et al. (2013) conducted a study researching the correlation between self-esteem and loneliness. A significant negative correlation between self-esteem and loneliness was found. This finding indicates that as the level of self-esteem increases, the level of loneliness decreases. This study found that self-esteem is a significant predictor of loneliness (Yilmaz et al., 2013).

Past studies have also demonstrated this relationship (Olmstead et al., 1991). The association between self-esteem and loneliness makes sense when one considers the definition of loneliness. Weiss (1973) defines loneliness as an exceedingly unpleasant and driving experience connected with inadequate discharge of the need for human intimacy. Individuals not successful in building close relationships with others are those who experience loneliness. As Sociometer theory asserts, self-esteem is derived by close relationships, so self-esteem should have a negative correlation with loneliness. Thus, this evidence of the relationship between self-esteem and loneliness supports the Sociometer theory.

Another construct associated with self-esteem is the quality of relationships. Overall, it has been found that the quality of an interaction in a close relationship is positively correlated with self-esteem. Denissen, Penke, Schmitt, and van Aken (2008) studied this association at various levels: within the individual (intraindividual), within a relationship (interindividual), and among nations (international). They found that based on an intraindividual level, when people reported higher quality and quantity of interactions, they also had a higher self-esteem. On an interindividual level, people who generally felt close to important others had higher levels of trait self-esteem. On an international level, countries whose inhabitants regularly interact with friends were characterized by higher nationwide self-esteem levels than countries without such cultural practices. These results illustrate how self-esteem levels are related to people's personal lives and society as a whole.

Not everyone values relationships to the same degree. These differences in the significance of relationships may impact the association between relationship quality and self-esteem. Specifically, the basis of men and women's self-esteem may diverge markedly. Josephs, Markus, and Tafarodi (1992) found that men derive and maintain self-esteem through thinking

about individuating achievements. Women, on the other hand, derive self-esteem through maintaining connection and interdependence with others. Having high self-esteem is related to succeeding at these tasks or adhering to these norms (Josephs et al., 1992). Overall, self-esteem is strongly associated with other relational variables, like loneliness and the quality of relationships, and these associations support the Sociometer Theory.

### **The Relational Self-Construal as a Moderator**

So far, the relational self-construal and Sociometer theory have been presented and discussed. These constructs have a lot in common, especially regarding their emphasis on relationships. Because of the common emphasis on relationships, the current study correlates the relational self-construal and self-esteem with relational success variables: quality of relationships and loneliness. These relational success variables have been linked with self-esteem in past studies. This study expands on the past research to develop a fuller understanding of the role of the relational-self-construal in regards to these relational success variables.

Research has shown the connection between self-confidence, which is closely related to self-esteem, and the relational self-construal. Gabriel et al. (2007) conducted a study testing the effect that exposure to a close friend had on self-confidence. There was a significant difference between high relationals: those who were thinking of a relationship partner had an increase in self-confidence compared to those who were not thinking of a relationship partner. In contrast, low relationals did not show the same effects. The conclusion is that high relationals feel most confident about their social selves, which makes sense because relationships are self-defining. Because self-esteem and self-confidence are related, these results plant the seed that perhaps the relational self-construal can help explain the Sociometer theory. In this light, the results for the

high relationals support Sociometer theory more directly than the results for the low relationals. Perhaps the relational self-construal can help explain when Sociometer theory is most applicable.

According to the Sociometer Theory, self-esteem is the output from relational acceptance or rejection. While the Sociometer Theory provides important insights, perhaps its claims depend in part on the importance of relationships in one's self-construal. Possibly, the relational self-construal is a moderator of self-esteem. For high relationals, relationships with close others are self-defining. Perhaps high relationals' self-esteem is more dependent on relationships than low relationals' self-esteem. To actually test this prediction, the hypotheses are based on the demonstrated associations between self-esteem and the quality of relationships and loneliness.

Relational success can be measured by the quality of a person's relationship with a close friend, or it can be measured by looking at one's overall connection with others. Because of this distinction, the current research examines the moderating effects of the relational self-construal on both levels: individuals focused on both a special friendship (quality of relationship), and their overall sense of connection (loneliness). The purpose of this study is to test the extent to which the quality of relationships and loneliness are related to self-esteem. Self-esteem, as defined by the Sociometer theory, should be related to these relational concepts.

Loneliness results when an individual feels inadequate in light of one's preference for social involvement (Weiss, 1973). Because high relationals are self-defined by their close relationships, it follows that they would prefer social involvement. This can be further demonstrated based on the research which shows that high relationals strive to build and maintain relationships with others. Research done by Yilmaz et al. (2013) and Olmstead et al. (1991) suggests that loneliness and self-esteem are negatively correlated, which supports the Sociometer Theory. I expect that for high relationals, loneliness will take a bigger hit on their

self-esteem because loneliness directly affects their self-concept. High relationals define themselves based on their relationships with others, so loneliness may act as a sort of warning sign of low relational acceptance, and this loneliness may be related to self-esteem. For low relationals, on the other hand, relationships are less important so loneliness won't be as strongly related to self-esteem.

**Hypothesis 1:** I hypothesize that the relationship between loneliness and self-esteem will be moderated by the relational self-construal. For high relationals, there will be a strong negative correlation between loneliness and self-esteem. For low relationals, there will be less of a negative association between loneliness and self-esteem.

Research done by Denissen et al. (2008) suggests that the quality of relationships is positively associated with self-esteem, which supports the Sociometer Theory. I expect that this pattern will be more pronounced for high relationals because these individuals define themselves in terms of close relationships with others. For a high relational, the close relationship is included in their self-concept, and this self-definition will most likely result in a more direct link between relationship quality and self-esteem. Recall the gas gauge metaphor at the beginning of the paper. Perhaps high relationals have a gauge which is more sensitive to social cues. On the other hand, perhaps low relationals have a gauge which isn't quite as sensitive to social cues.

**Hypothesis 2:** I hypothesize that the relationship between the quality of relationships and self-esteem will be moderated by the relational self-construal. For high relationals, there will be a strong positive correlation between the quality of relationships and self-esteem. For low relationals, there will be less of a positive association between the quality of relationships and self-esteem.

## Method

### Participants

There were 183 students who participated in this study, all from the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University (CSB/SJU). From this sample, 181 were students, and 2 did not specify. There were 136 women and 47 men. There was a variety of class years represented: 90 participants were first years, 59 were sophomores, 18 were juniors, and 13 were seniors, although 3 did not specify class year. Students were recruited from Introduction to Psychology and Social Psychology classes. The students received partial course credit in their Introduction to Psychology class or extra credit in their Social Psychology class.

### Materials and Procedure

Participants completed an online survey. The survey included four scales.

**Self-esteem.** To measure self-esteem, I used Rosenberg's Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965; see Appendix A). The purpose of this scale is to measure how strongly an individual expresses the feeling that they are "good enough" (self-esteem). There are 10 items on this measure. Participants rated how they felt about each statement based on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*). Some statements include: "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others," "I take a positive attitude toward myself," and "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself." Five items on the measure needed to be reverse-scored. The total score was calculated by adding up points, and scores between 15 and 25 are within the normal range and scores below 15 suggest low self-esteem. The scale is internally reliable (reproducibility is .92) and unidimensional (Rosenberg, 1965). With this sample, Cronbach's Alpha was .85.



**Relational self-construal.** To measure the relational self-construal, the Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal (RISC) scale was used (Cross et al., 2000; see Appendix B). The purpose of this measure is to directly conceptualize the relational-interdependent self-construal (RISC) in terms of the degree to which individuals include close relationships in their self-concepts. There are 11 items on the RISC scale, some of which include: “my close relationships are an important reflection of who I am,” “my sense of pride comes from knowing who I have as close friends,” and “when I think of myself, I often think of my close friends or family also.” Participants rated each item on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Two items on the measure needed to be reverse-scored. Higher scores indicate a higher relational self-construal. Cross et al. (2000) indicate that the RISC has high reliability and validity. Coefficient alpha ranged from .85 to .90, with a mean of .88, and test-retest reliability over a two-month interval was .73 (Cross et al., 2000). With this sample, Cronbach’s Alpha was .88.

**Quality of relationships.** To measure the quality of relationships, the Quality of Relationship Index (QRI) was used (Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991; see Appendix C). The purpose of this measure is to assess relationship-specific perceptions of available support. The scale has three dimensions: support, conflict, and depth. For this study, the instructions were: “For the next questionnaire, you will need to think of one of your closest friends and answer the questionnaire based on your interactions with that friend. Please think of your closest friend and write his or her initials in the following box.” Initials were collected in order to ensure that participants would discuss the same relationship throughout the questionnaire. There are 25 items on the QRI, some of which include: “to what extent could you turn to this person for advice about problems?” and “how positive a role does this person play in your life?”

Participants rated each item on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*Not at All*) to 4 (*Very Much*). Higher scores indicate a higher quality of relationship. Pierce et al. (1991) found alpha coefficients ranging between .84 and .91 for the dimensions when the scale was referring to the friendship. With this sample, Cronbach's Alpha was .84.

**Loneliness.** To measure loneliness, the Loneliness Scale was used (Russell, 1996; see Appendix D). The purpose of this scale is to measure the degree to which an individual is lonely. There are 20 items that participants rated on a Likert scale from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*always*). Some sample items are: "how often do you feel that you lack companionship?" and "how often do you feel that no one really knows you well?" Some items are reverse scored, and the sum of the scores is the loneliness score. Higher scores indicate greater degrees of loneliness. The scale is highly reliable, with an internal consistency ranging from .89 to .94 and a test-retest reliability of .73 (Russell, 1996). The scale also has high convergent validity and construct validity (Russell, 1996). With this sample, Cronbach's Alpha was .92.

**Demographics.** Participants indicated their gender and year in school.

## Results

Descriptive statistics for each scale are provided in Table 1. T-tests were conducted on each of the scales to test for gender differences, and the results are provided in Table 2. As seen in Table 3, all of the variables correlated significantly with each other at the .01 level.

### Loneliness

Hypothesis 1 predicted that the relational self-construal would moderate the relationship between loneliness and self-esteem. For high relationals, there would be a strong negative association between loneliness and self-esteem. For low relationals, there would be less of an association between loneliness and self-esteem. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was

conducted to predict self-esteem. In the first step, loneliness and RISC were entered. The results of the first step of this analysis showed a main effect of loneliness (see Table 4). This indicates that participants with lower loneliness scores had higher self-esteem scores. In the second step, the interaction of loneliness and RISC was entered. This interaction was not statistically significant. Therefore, the first hypothesis was not supported.

Because of the gender difference in RISC scores and self-esteem scores among participants (see Table 2), a hierarchical multiple regression that included gender was conducted to predict self-esteem. In the first step, loneliness, RISC, and gender were entered. The results of the first step of this analysis showed main effects of loneliness and gender (see Table 5). This indicates that participants with lower loneliness scores had higher self-esteem scores. It also indicates that men had significantly higher self-esteem scores than women. In the second step, the two-way interactions were entered: loneliness and RISC, loneliness and gender, and gender and RISC. There were no significant interactions (see Table 5). In the third step, the 3-way interaction of gender, RISC, and loneliness was entered. The 3-way interaction was not significant (see Table 5). Overall, these results show that there is a strong negative correlation between loneliness and self-esteem, and that men have significantly higher self-esteem scores than women.

### **Quality of Relationship**

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the relational self-construal would moderate the relationship between the QRI and self-esteem. For high relationals, there would be a strong positive association between the QRI and self-esteem. For low relationals, there would be less of an association between the QRI and self-esteem. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict self-esteem. In the first step, QRI and RISC were entered. The results of the

first step of this analysis showed a main effect of RISC (see Table 6). This indicates that participants with higher RISC scores had higher self-esteem scores. In the second step, the two-way interaction of QRI and RISC was entered. This interaction was not significant (see Table 6). Therefore, the second hypothesis was not supported.

Because of the gender difference in RISC scores and self-esteem scores among participants (see Table 2), a hierarchical multiple regression analysis including gender was conducted to predict self-esteem. In the first step, QRI, RISC, and gender were entered. The results of the first step of this analysis showed main effects of RISC and gender (see Table 7). This indicates that participants with higher RISC scores had higher self-esteem scores. This also indicates that men had significantly higher self-esteem scores than women. In the second step, the two-way interactions were entered: QRI and RISC, QRI and gender, and RISC and gender. None of these interactions were significant (see Table 7). In the third step, a 3-way interaction of QRI, RISC, and gender was entered. The 3-way interaction between QRI, RISC, and gender was significant (see Table 7). Overall, these results show that there is a strong positive correlation between QRI scores and self-esteem scores, men had higher self-esteem scores than women, and there is a significant 3-way interaction of QRI, RISC, and gender. In order to explain the significant 3-way interaction, separate hierarchical regressions were run for male participants and female participants.

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict self-esteem from QRI and RISC, just for the female participants. In the first step, QRI and RISC were entered. The results of the first step of this analysis showed a main effect of RISC (see Table 8). This indicates that women with higher RISC scores had higher self-esteem scores. In the second step, the interaction of QRI and RISC was entered. The results showed a significant interaction (see

Table 8). These results support Hypothesis 2: the relational self-construal moderates the relationship between the quality of relationships and self-esteem. For high relationals, the quality of relationships is strongly associated with self-esteem. For low relationals, the quality of relationships is not associated with self-esteem.

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict self-esteem from QRI and RISC, just for the male participants. In the first step, QRI and RISC were entered. The results of the first step of this analysis showed no main effects (see Table 9). In the second step, the interaction of QRI and RISC was entered. The results did not show a significant interaction (see Table 9). For men, the results were not significant and do not support Hypothesis 2.

### **Discussion**

The current study examined the role of the relational self-construal in the relationship between relational success and self-esteem. The study had two general hypotheses: (1) the relationship between loneliness and self-esteem would be moderated by the relational self-construal, and (2) the relationship between the quality of relationships and self-esteem would be moderated by the relational self-construal. Although the hypotheses were not supported directly, there were some interesting and applicable findings, especially regarding gender differences.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that relational self-construal would moderate the relationship between loneliness and self-esteem. For high relationals, a strong negative association between loneliness and self-esteem was predicted. For low relationals, less of an association between loneliness and self-esteem was predicted. The results showed a strong, negative association between self-esteem and loneliness, as predicted. The results also showed that men had higher levels of self-esteem than women. No matter the relational self-construal level of the individual, though, self-esteem and loneliness were strongly correlated. So, when an individual experienced

high levels of loneliness, self-esteem tended to be lower regardless of whether the individual had a high or low relational self-construal. Thus, there was a significant main effect of loneliness predicting self-esteem.

The loneliness experience is unique and profound, which may help to explain these results. Cacioppo, Capitanio, and Cacioppo (2014) reviewed research on the health risks related to loneliness. Past studies have shown that loneliness is related to lower subjective well-being, heightened caution for social threats, and decreased executive functioning in the brain. This suggests that neural processes may change as a result of loneliness (Cacioppo et al., 2014). This study found that loneliness is a significant risk factor for mortality; in fact, it is just as strong of a risk factor for mortality as smoking, obesity, a sedentary lifestyle, and high blood pressure. Loneliness is also positively correlated with depression (Russell, 1996). Loneliness mediates the relationship between anxiety and depression (Ebesutani, Fierstein, Viana, Trent, Young, and Sprung, 2015). Such results show how loneliness is associated with negative psychological health.

Similarly, low self-esteem is also related to negative psychological health. Rosenberg (1965) found a negative correlation between high self-esteem and depression. People with low self-esteem scores are more likely to appear depressed to others and more likely to express feelings of unhappiness, gloom, or discouragement (Rosenberg, 1965). Thus, the relationship between loneliness and self-esteem makes sense because both of these variables are related to negative health outcomes.

Loneliness can also undermine a person's sense of self-esteem in indirect ways. Perhaps social support mediates the relationship between loneliness and self-esteem. For example, it is important for successes or achievements to be recognized by others in order for the individual to

stay motivated to work hard. When successes are not celebrated by others, an individual may feel inadequate and underappreciated, resulting in a feeling of loneliness and low self-esteem. So, even though a person may not be defined by relationships with close others, loneliness may be related to lower self-esteem.

The relationship between loneliness and self-esteem supports the Sociometer theory. Both self-esteem and loneliness are clearly related to human intimacy. The lack of human intimacy is essentially the definition of loneliness (Weiss, 1973). Sociometer theory claims that self-esteem is the output from relational acceptance or rejection. Such relational acceptance stems from and leads to human intimacy. Surely, it is hard to feel intimate with someone who rejects another. It would also make sense that one would feel lonely after being rejected in a relationship. The relationship between loneliness and self-esteem is profound. Both concepts are related to negative psychological health, and they both can result from inadequate appreciation and socialization. Low self-esteem results from relational rejection, which is quite similar to loneliness conceptually. The strong, negative relationship between self-esteem and loneliness supports the Sociometer Theory.

There is a significant relationship between the self-esteem and loneliness, which is consistent with past research, yet the relational self-construal did not moderate this relationship as predicted. Perhaps it did not moderate the association between loneliness and self-esteem simply because of the scope of the loneliness scale. The loneliness scale measures the connection an individual feels across all relationships, whereas the relational self-construal is derived from close, intimate relationships. Even though both loneliness and relational self-construal are relational constructs, they are getting at different levels of the relationship experience. This difference may explain why the results did not match the predictions. This discussion implies

that relationships can be measured in many different ways, with differing outcomes. Thus, the operational definition of “relational success” matters.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the relational self-construal would moderate the relationship between the quality of relationships and self-esteem. For high relationals, a strong, positive relationship between the quality of relationships and self-esteem was predicted. For low relationals, less of a relationship between the quality of relationships and self-esteem was predicted. For women, the results were significant. However, for men, the results were not significant. Perhaps the scope of the quality of relationship index contributed to the significant results. The quality of relationship index focused on a specific, intimate relationship, and this matches the level of analysis of the relational self-construal scale, which focuses on close relationships that are part of one’s self-definition. Recall the suggestion that the loneliness scale was incongruent with the scope of the relational self construal. The relational success variables in this study measured these different scopes. The results suggest that the scope of measures may influence how related variables are with the relational self-construal.

Figure 1 shows the interaction between quality of relationships and RISC predicting self-esteem, but only for women. These results were significant, supporting the hypothesis. The predicted pattern is apparent for high relationals: when the quality of relationships is low, the self-esteem levels are low. When the quality of relationships is high, self-esteem levels are also high. Yet, as predicted, the pattern does not hold true for low relationals. Self-esteem levels for low relationals are the same regardless of the quality of relationship. These results showed significant differences for women in the study, but not for men. Why were the results for the men not significant?



### **Gender Differences**

In this study, the results for the women and men were different. Such a difference has implications for the understanding of gender's role in the relational self-construal and self-esteem. Recall research by Josephs et al. (1992), which found that the source of men and women's self-esteem differs. Men attain and sustain self-esteem by thinking of individuating achievements. Women derive self-esteem through maintaining connection and interdependence with others. These findings may begin to explain how men's self-esteem was not associated with the quality of the relationship, whereas women's self-esteem was associated greatly with the quality of the relationship.

Based on the current research, one can also see how the relational self-construal moderates this association for women. While Josephs et al. (1992) generalizes that all women derive self-esteem through maintaining connection and interdependence with others, perhaps this statement is truer for high relationals. Josephs et al. (1992) don't acknowledge these individual differences among women and among men. While men also vary in regards to the degree they define themselves based on their relationships with others (RISC level), as seen by the current results, this did not bring about significant differences in the association between self-esteem levels and the quality of relationships. For women, though, relational self-construal did moderate the relationship between self-esteem and quality of relationships.

For men, the cultural influence and the gender stereotypes match somewhat. Men are socialized from many angles to value individuating achievements and characteristics. Although there is still variability in men's self-construal, the outcome (self-esteem) may be greatly affected by socialization. Perhaps this socialization leads to less variability among men's self-esteem. Men are supposed to be strong and tough; perhaps the outcome of this is that they feel they

cannot let relational output influence how they feel about themselves.

### **Implications for Sociometer Theory**

The main hypotheses in this study were based on the Sociometer Theory, which asserts that self-esteem level is embedded in relationships. When an individual has inadequate relational value, low self-esteem is the likely result. On the other hand, if an individual feels sufficient relational value, high self-esteem is the result. The significant results of the association between high relational women's self-esteem levels and quality of relationships support the Sociometer theory. When a high relational woman has high quality relationships, self-esteem is much higher than it would be if the woman experienced low quality relationships.

On the other hand, these results showed that for low relational women, quality of relationships does not impact self-esteem levels. These findings are inconsistent the Sociometer Theory. They suggest that Sociometer Theory applies mostly to high relational women. So, this study demonstrates some boundary conditions of the Sociometer Theory. The theory is viable for high relational women, but not for low relational women. The results do not invalidate the Sociometer theory, but rather question its external validity. The results also validate the importance of the relational self-construal for relationally-based theories, such as Sociometer theory. Perhaps other theories could be supported more easily if they took into account the important individual differences between high and low relationals. The results also highlight the importance of gender when looking at relationally based theories.

### **Limitations**

A potential limitation to this study is the unequal sample size of men and women. Men are underrepresented in the study, which may result in low power. While there were not

significant results for the men, perhaps this would be different if there were an equivalent number of men and women.

Another potential limitation is the restriction of range from the sample. The researchers sampled from a population which has generally higher relational self-construal scores than the average. This may have resulted in overlooking valuable insights in the analysis. This limitation particularly applies to the male participants. Perhaps the men in this sample did not adequately represent men in general; this may have contributed to the non-significant results.

### **Future Directions**

The scope of the scales most likely had an influence on the results of this study. The researchers in this study defined “relational success” by the scores from the loneliness, self-esteem, and quality of relationship scales. This study demonstrated the relationship between the relational self-construal, quality of relationships, and self-esteem. Certainly, there are other relational constructs that could have an important relationship with the relational self-construal. Perhaps future research could utilize other measures of relationship success.

In this study, there were a disproportionate number of men compared to women in the sample. Results were not significant for men, but perhaps this is due to the low sample size and low power. Future research could test that these results are supported with a larger sample of men.

The current research used quantitative data to analyze the relationships among the constructs, and found significant results. Future research could utilize qualitative data to attempt to further understand the meaning of these results, especially the reported gender differences. Specifically, researchers may examine the nature of the self-esteem for high relational men. For example, why is the relational self-construal not as associated with self-esteem for men?

This study analyzed data related to an individual's well-being. Perhaps future research could test whether certain tactics would increase a person's overall well-being. Specifically, this research could address how the relational self-construal may fit into the therapeutic process. For example, how can a therapist best help a high relational client who is struggling with low self-esteem? On the other hand, how can a therapist best help a low relational client struggling with low self-esteem?

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Overall, this study contributed to the literature which describes the importance of individual differences in self-construal. The results showed that high relational women who have a high relationship quality experienced a high self-esteem. This finding supports Leary's sociometer theory. Perhaps his theory applies most directly to individuals who value relationships. Thus, women who are defined by their relationships with close others have a self-esteem which is more dependent on their relationships with others. This may be associated with greater self-esteem variability, depending on how stable the close relationships are. It also may be associated with more relationship-promoting behavior, to maintain quality relationships and a high self-esteem.

For low relational women, the results were different. There was no association between the quality of relationships and self-esteem. This makes sense because relationships are not self-defining for low relationals. It is not to say that close relationships do not matter to low relationals; rather, there is less of an association between relationships with others and personal feelings.

Overall, the study will help us understand the potential moderating role of the relational self-construal for self-esteem and relationship quality for women. The boundary conditions of

Sociometer theory were tested, and the insights this study provided can help specify the theory.

We can now understand with greater clarity how self-concept and self-esteem work hand in hand to produce the interesting link between self-esteem and relationship quality.

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Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics*

Measure	Mean	Standard Deviation
Self-Esteem Scale	53.44	9.04
RISC scale	59.98	8.94
QRI	97.48	7.70
Loneliness Scale	39.34	9.77

*Note.* RISC = Relational Interdependent Self-Construal. QRI = Quality of Relationship Index.

Table 2

*Independent Samples t-test Results: Gender Differences among each Scale*

Measure	Men	Women	<i>t</i> -value
Self-Esteem	56.34	52.43	2.59*
RISC	58.51	60.49	-1.31
QRI	84.89	88.38	-2.72**
Loneliness	38.77	39.54	-0.47

*Note.* RISC = Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal scale. QRI = Quality of Relationship Index. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 3

*Correlation Matrix*

	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Self-Esteem				
2. RISC	.27**			
3. QRI	.21**	.46**		
4. Loneliness	-.54**	-.37**	-.37**	

*Note.* RISC = Relational Interdependent Self-Construal Scale. QRI = Quality of Relationship Index. \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 4

*Hierarchical Regression for Loneliness and RISC predicting Self-Esteem*

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
<u>Step 1</u>				
Loneliness	-4.56	0.61	-0.51	-7.48**
RISC	0.77	0.61	0.09	1.26
<u>Step 2</u>				
Loneliness x RISC	0.24	0.51	0.03	0.47

*Note.* RISC = Relational-Interdependent Self Construal. Coefficients reported at the step in which the variable was entered.  $N = 183$ .  $R^2 = 0.29$ ,  $F(2, 180) = 37.48$ ,  $p < .001$  for Step 1;  $R^2$  change = .001,  $F(1, 179) = 0.22$ ,  $p > .05$  for Step 2.

Table 5

*Hierarchical Regression for Loneliness and RISC predicting Self-Esteem*

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
<u>Step 1</u>				
Loneliness	-4.43	0.60	-0.49	-7.39**
RISC	0.98	0.60	0.11	1.63
Gender	-3.77	1.28	-0.18	-2.96**
<u>Step 2</u>				
Loneliness x RISC	0.30	0.51	0.04	0.59
Loneliness x Gender	-2.25	1.47	-0.46	-1.54
Gender x RISC	0.48	1.41	0.09	0.34
<u>Step 3</u>				
Gender x RISC x Loneliness	0.23	1.49	0.05	0.15

*Note.* RISC = Relational-Interdependent Self-Constructual Scale. Coefficients reported at the step in which the variable was entered.  $N = 183$ .  $R^2 = 0.33$ ,  $F(3, 179) = 28.98$ ,  $p < .001$  for Step 1;  $R^2$  change = 0.01,  $F(3, 176) = 1.15$ ,  $p > .05$  for Step 2;  $R^2$  change = .00,  $F(1, 175) = 0.02$ ,  $p > .05$  for Step 3. \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 6

*Hierarchical Regression for QRI and RISC predicting Self-Esteem*

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
<u>Step 1</u>				
QRI	0.11	0.08	0.11	1.35
RISC	0.22	0.08	0.22	2.79**
<u>Step 2</u>				
QRI x RISC	0.07	0.05	0.13	1.58

*Note.* QRI = Quality of Relationship Index. RISC = Relational-Interdependent Self Construal. Coefficients reported at the step in which the variable was entered.  $N = 183$ .  $R^2 = 0.08$ ,  $F(2, 180) = 8.26$  ( $p < .01$ ) for Step 1;  $R^2$  change = 0.01,  $F(1, 179) = 2.51$  ( $p > .05$ ) for Step 2. \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 7

*Hierarchical Regression for RISC and QRI predicting Self-Esteem*

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
<u>Step 1</u>				
QRI	1.41	0.72	0.16	1.97
RISC	2.04	0.71	0.23	2.89**
Gender	-4.99	1.46	-0.24	-3.42**
<u>Step 2</u>				
QRI x RISC	0.76	0.43	0.15	1.75
QRI x Gender	-0.51	1.86	-0.10	-0.27
Gender x RISC	0.79	1.75	0.16	0.45
<u>Step 3</u>				
Gender x RISC x QRI	2.49	0.99	0.82	2.51*

*Note.* QRI = Quality of Relationship Index. RISC scale = Relational-Interdependent Self-Construct Scale. Coefficients reported at the step in which the variable was entered.  $N = 183$ .  $R^2 = 0.14$ ,  $F(3, 179) = 9.74$ ,  $p < .001$  for Step 1;  $R^2$  change = 0.02,  $F(3, 176) = 1.33$ ,  $p > .05$  for Step 2;  $R^2$  change = 0.03,  $F(1, 175) = 6.30$ ,  $p < .05$  for Step 3. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 8

*Hierarchical Regression for RISC and QRI predicting Self-Esteem for Women*

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
<u>Step 1</u>				
QRI	1.33	0.80	0.15	1.67
RISC	2.40	0.81	0.27	2.96**
<u>Step 2</u>				
QRI x RISC	1.37	0.49	0.24	2.77**

*Note.* QRI = Quality of Relationship Index. RISC = Relational-Interdependent Self-Constructual Scale. Coefficients reported at the step in which the variable was entered.  $N = 136$ .  $R^2 = 0.13$ ,  $F(2, 133) = 9.68$ ,  $p < .01$  for Step 1;  $R^2$  change = 0.05,  $F(1, 132) = 7.64$ ,  $p < .01$  for Step 2. \*\* $p < .01$ .



Table 9

*Hierarchical Regression for RISC and QRI predicting Self-Esteem for Men*

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
<u>Step 1</u>				
QRI	1.78	1.64	0.19	1.09
RISC	0.83	1.45	0.09	0.57
<u>Step 2</u>				
QRI x RISC	-1.13	0.84	-0.29	-1.33

*Note.* QRI = Quality of Relationship Index. RISC = Relational-Interdependent Self-Constructual Scale. Coefficients reported at the step in which the variable was entered.  $N = 47$ .  $R^2 = 0.06$ ,  $F(2, 44) = 1.47$ ,  $p > .05$  for Step 1;  $R^2$  change = 0.04,  $F(1, 43) = 1.78$ ,  $p > .05$  for Step 2.

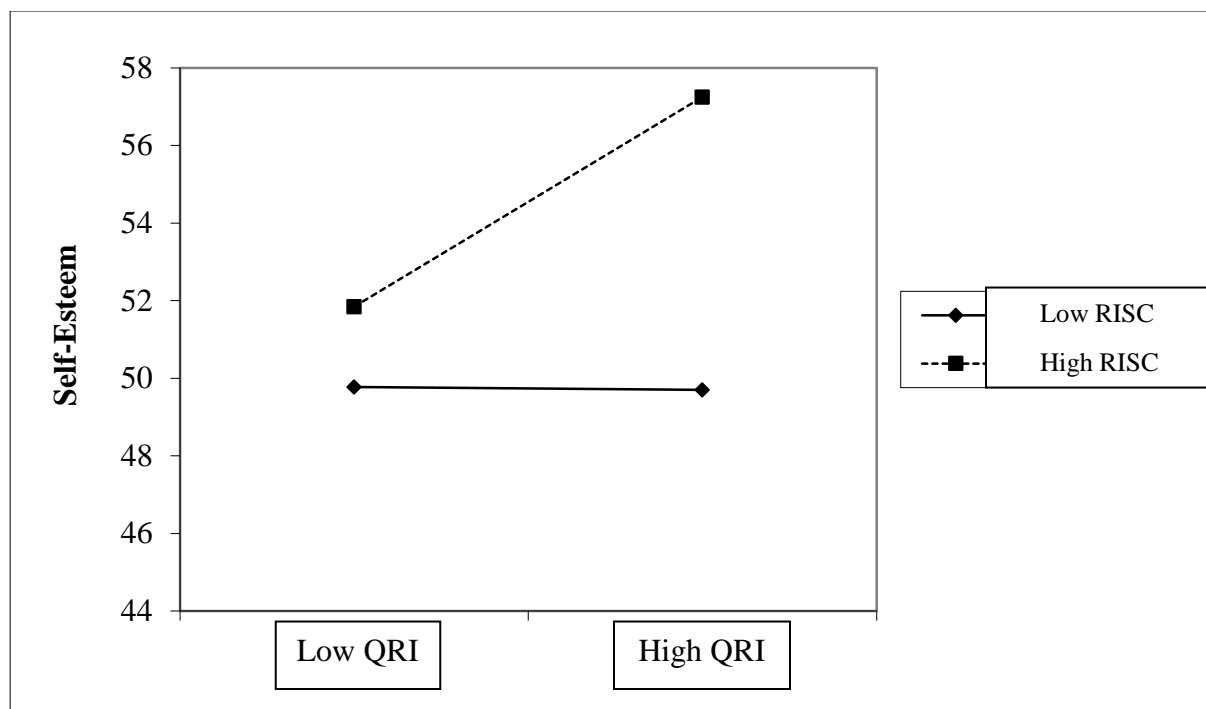


Figure 1. Interaction between RISC and QRI predicting Self-Esteem among female participants.

## Appendix A

## Self-Esteem (Rosenberg, 1965)

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of these statements, using the following scale:

0	1	2	3
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
9. I certainly feel useless at times.
10. At times I think I am no good at all.

## Appendix B

## Relational-Interdependent Self-Construct (Cross et al., 2000)

Listed below are a number of statements about various attitudes and feelings. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of these statements, using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Neutral	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. My close relationships are an important reflection of who I am.
2. When I feel very close to someone, it often feels to me like that person is an important part of who I am.
3. I usually feel a strong sense of pride when someone close to me has an important accomplishment.
4. I think one of the most important parts of who I am can be captured by looking at my close friends and understanding who they are.
5. When I think of myself, I often think of my close friends or family also.
6. If a person hurts someone close to me, I feel personally hurt as well.
7. In general, my close relationships are an important part of my self-image.
8. Overall, my close relationships have very little to do with how I feel about myself.
9. My close relationships are unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am.
10. My sense of pride comes from knowing who I have as close friends.
11. When I establish a close friendship with someone, I usually develop a strong sense of identification with that person.

## Appendix C

## Quality of Relationships Index

Please use the scale below to describe your relationship with \_\_\_\_\_.

Not at all (A)

A Little (B)

Quite a bit (C)

Very Much (D)

1. To what extent could you turn to this person for advice about problems?
2. How often do you need to work hard to avoid conflict with this person?
3. To what extent could you count on this person for help with a problem?
4. How upset does this person sometimes make you feel?
5. To what extent can you count on this person to give you honest feedback, even if you might not want to hear it?
6. How much does this person make you feel guilty?
7. How much do you have to “give in” in this relationship?
8. To what extent can you count on this person to help you if a family member very close to you died?
9. How much does this person want you to change?
10. How positive a role does this person play in your life?
11. How significant is this relationship in your life?
12. How close will your relationship be with this person in 10 years?
13. How much would you miss this person if the two of you could not see or talk with each other for a month?
14. How critical of you is this person?
15. If you wanted to go out and do something this evening, how confident are you that this person would be willing to do something with you?

16. How responsible do you feel for this person's well-being?
17. How much do you depend on this person?
18. To what extent can you count on this person to listen to you when you are very angry at someone else?
19. How much would you like this person to change?
20. How angry does this person make you feel?
21. How much do you argue with this person?
22. To what extent can you really count on this person to distract you from your worries when you feel under stress?
23. How often does this person make you feel angry?
24. How often does this person try to control or influence your life?
25. How much more do you give than you get from this relationship?

## Appendix D

## Loneliness (Russell, 1996)

The following statements describe how people sometimes feel. For each statement, please indicate how often you feel the way described using this scale:

1	2	3	4
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always

1. How often do you feel that you are “in tune” with the people around you?
2. How often do you feel that you lack companionship?
3. How often do you feel that there is no one you can turn to?
4. How often do you feel alone?
5. How often do you feel part of a group of friends?
6. How often do you feel that you have a lot in common with the people around you?
7. How often do you feel that you are no longer close to anyone?
8. How often do you feel that your interests and ideas are not shared by those around you?
9. How often do you feel outgoing and friendly?
10. How often do you feel close to people?
11. How often do you feel left out?
12. How often do you feel that your relationships with others are not meaningful?
13. How often do you feel that no one really knows you well?
14. How often do you feel isolated from others?
15. How often do you feel you can find companionship when you want it?
16. How often do you feel that there are people who really understand you?
17. How often do you feel shy?

18. How often do you feel that people are around you but not with you?
19. How often do you feel that there are people you can talk to?
20. How often do you feel that there are people you can turn to?